

STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**DON COX**

P.O. Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600



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## FALL EDUCATION UPDATE

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November 2001

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

With our children back in the classroom, many of us turn our attention to the state of our schools. I thought this would be a good time to update you on some of the changes we've made in the Legislature to improve our schools and increase learning opportunities for students in our state.

This year we enacted changes that will bring more qualified professionals to our classrooms and provide incentives to keep some of our more experienced educators working in the education field.

Some significant changes in state funding were also approved, thanks in large part to the voters, who approved two initiatives providing automatic teacher pay raises and dedicated funding for specific education enhancements.

Of course our true focus, whether budgeting or making policy changes, is increasing student achievement and preparing students to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

I am pleased and proud to report that several of the schools in the 9<sup>th</sup> District met their reading goals. I look forward to visiting the students and faculty who worked so diligently to achieve this exceptional standard.

I hope this update provides you with an idea of some of the things the Legislature is working on to improve learning opportunities. As always, I welcome your input. Please don't hesitate to contact me and share your views on the issues of importance to you and your family.

Sincerely,



STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**DON COX**  
9<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



# 2001 FALL EDUCATION UPDATE



## ■ ADDRESSING OUR TEACHER SHORTAGE

Recruiting and retaining our best teachers continues to challenge our schools. This session we succeeded in adopting legislation that will help us attract and retain the most qualified teachers to the classroom.

Among the bills we approved this session was Senate Bill 5695, a measure that creates a statewide partnership grant program to establish alternative certification programs for classified school employees and successful professionals who want to enter the teaching profession.

This bill will make it easier for qualified individuals to become certified to teach. These individuals will help alleviate growing teacher shortages and enhance the learning experience for students by bringing to the classroom expertise gained through real-world experience.

We also have increased the number of hours retired teachers can continue to work without a reduction in pension benefits. This change will allow our schools to continue calling upon our most experienced teachers for part-time or substitute work.

Another measure we passed, Senate Bill 5937, will allow experienced retired teachers and administrators to be rehired without losing their retirement benefits. This will help keep knowledgeable and skilled teachers in Washington.



## ■ ACCOUNTABILITY IN OUR SCHOOLS

Among the disappointments this past year was our failure to adopt policies for dealing with schools that fail to meet new accountability standards. We have set our sights high with new academic learning requirements and are using standardized tests to measure our effectiveness in improving student learning. And we provided additional assistance to our most challenged schools. Our next step is to set up a system of accountability that allows us to assist parents and schools where test scores are not demonstrating improvement.

Education accountability must be a top priority for the Legislature during the 2002 session, which begins in January. It will require that we understand what prevents children from learning, and creating a system for local educators, parents and the Legislature to work together and ensure academic success for all children. We need very rigorous validation studies on our state test, and must devise multiple methods of showing the standards have been met.



## ■ VOTER-APPROVED FUNDING MEASURES BOLSTER SCHOOL BUDGETS

We are now spending \$9.9 billion per biennium on K-12 education, which represents nearly 45 percent of the state budget. Voters made a strong statement in favor of funding for schools by approving two education initiatives last November. The initiatives resulted in a nearly nine percent increase in our state's investment in education.

Initiative 732 guarantees annual cost-of-living pay increases for teachers based on the Seattle consumer price index.

I-728 provides that the revenue distributions to school districts may be used for:

- Reducing class size
- Providing extended learning opportunities in grades K-12, including extended school hours, tutoring programs, weekend school programs, and all-day kindergarten
- Providing additional professional development for educators
- Providing early assistance for children in need of pre-kindergarten support, and
- Making improvements or additions to school building facilities.

The cost of the two initiatives totals nearly \$800 million in the current budget and will increase to more than \$1 billion in additional funding for schools in the 2001-03 biennium.

## ■ BUDGET CRISIS

The events of Sept. 11 continue to have serious consequences to our state and our communities. Last week, six thousand of our neighbors received layoff notices from Boeing, and friends and neighbors in countless other companies are receiving similarly bad news.



For the state, the consequences include reductions in forecast revenues, and greater demands for many public services. You may remember the concerns I shared with you regarding the budget we passed last spring, and recent news isn't good. Current estimates suggest that we may have as much as a billion-dollar gap for the 2001-2003 biennium.

Many legislators already have begun looking at strategies we can follow to deal with the developing budget crisis. Obviously, these strategies include adjustments to and/or elimination of programs. Governor Locke, for example, recently requested each of his department heads to identify cuts of 15% in their departments.

I am committed to protecting our education investment, but also recognize that we will likely be faced with very difficult choices.

Please let me know how you would like the Legislature to react to these challenges.

## DISTRICT OFFICE Now Open!

I am pleased to announce the opening of my 9<sup>th</sup> District Legislative Office. Please drop by and say hello to my Legislative Assistant Lynn Fallows in our new office located in the Whitman Plaza, 300 S. Main Street. Office hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. My district phone number is 509-397-5098. My Olympia address and phone number remains the same, PO Box 40600, Olympia, WA 98504-0600 and (360) 786-7942.